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“It’s Natural, We Have No Choice”: Practical Steps for Menstrual Equity in the Library

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"It's Natural, We Have No Choice"

Practical Steps for Menstrual Equity in the Library

Varina Kosovich, Sally Bowler-Hill

BACKGROUND

The UNM Health Sciences Library and Informatics Center (HSLIC) is New Mexico's only publicly accessible health sciences library. We serve learners in a variety of programs and medical professionals at the UNM Health Sciences Center (HSC), UNM Hospital, and beyond.

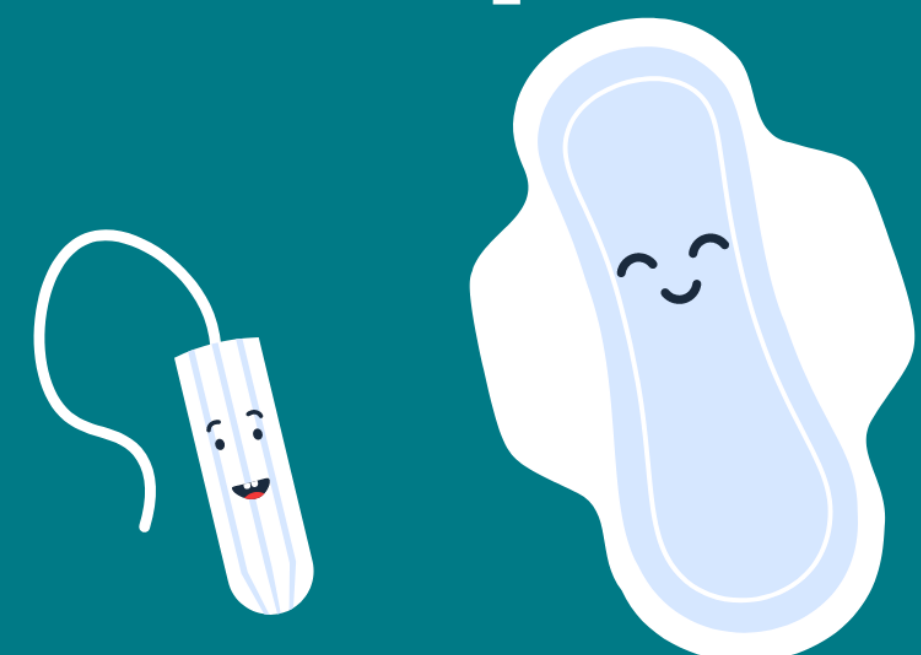
The library has three floors and six restrooms, none of which had stocked dispensers. This project was originally discussed in the library's Justice, Equity, and Inclusion (JEI) Committee after a student left a handwritten note on an empty dispenser which included the quote in this poster's title.

OBJECTIVES

Provide students, faculty, and staff with pads, tampons, and liners at no cost.

Create equitable spaces for transgender, non-binary, and gender diverse folks.

FREE
menstrual products



Please take only what you need

Sponsored by the Health Sciences Library & the Justice, Equity, and Inclusion Committee

METHODS

- » Reallocated a portion of the Student Library & Technology fee to fund supplies.
- » Conducted a literature review to determine what other institutions are providing and for tips on how to advocate.
 - Cardoso, L.F., Scolese, A.M., Hamidaddin, A. et al. Period poverty and mental health implications among college-aged women in the United States. BMC Women's Health 21, 14 (2021).
- » Researched vendors to discover what worked best for HSLIC. We initially ordered through a medical supply vendor and ended up using Amazon due to consistent availability and short shipping times.
- » Purchased a variety of products: pads, tampons in multiple absorbencies, and liners.
- » Placed menstrual products in all six restrooms, including the men's restrooms, to ensure access for anyone who menstruates. We selected affordable plastic bins rather than traditional wall mounted dispensers, and removed an old, empty dispenser from one of the restrooms.
- » Asked for employee participation and volunteers to keep products stocked.

RESULTS

We've seen consistent usage of products and refill the bins two to three times per week. Assessing such a private service is challenging, but the popularity of the program is apparent.

Supply Costs Sept 21-June 22	Container Costs (to hold supplies)	Removal of old, coin-operated dispenser	Total Project Costs Sept 21 to date	Number of Products Purchased	Average Cost per Product
\$890.71	\$69.30	\$361.70	\$1, 321.71	6,504	\$0.14

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Campus-Wide Initiatives

- » MD/PhD candidate project and survey at the HSC to study the need for menstrual products on campus.
- » Committee to select buildings for a menstrual product pilot program.

Assessment

- » After ten months, project team is considering these assessment options: simple feedback form or a question in the library's triannual customer satisfaction survey.

Containers vs. Dispensers

- » Evaluating whether to install new free-vend dispensers in the library restrooms. Dispensers hold more products, but also limit the products the library can offer and are expensive.

Universal Restroom

- » Library currently has a bid to construct a universal restroom on the second floor.

"[HSLIC] providing menstrual hygiene products for free in all their respective restrooms is visionary and provides a much-needed service that was otherwise lacking on campus. This program has the potential to make a large impact on people who menstruate, whether they started their period unexpectedly, simply forgot their tampons at home, or are experiencing chronic period poverty. As an advocate for menstrual equity, I'm proud to have this program at UNM School of Medicine and I hope that this serves as an example for other institutions. This is what justice looks like."

-Mandy Collar, MD-PhD Candidate, UNM

